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ABSTRACT

The Institutional Research Office at Delgado College (Louisiana) developed a campus-based mini-grant program awarding funds to individual faculty members proposing projects to improve instruction. Inservice workshops assisted the faculty in grant-writing and research development skills before grant proposals were solicited. Criteria for acceptance of proposals were: (1) the number of students to be affected; (2) the instructional problem under attack; (3) the proposed solution to the problem, its benefits to the students, and the specificity of conception; (4) the expected results and future usefulness of the methods and materials to students and other teachers; and (5) the determination of effective evaluation procedures for student achievement, the methods and materials used. The successful program resulted in faculty awareness of the Research Office's commitment to instruction and of the specific supportive skills available through that office. Appendices include descriptions of the 1975 mini-grants awarded, the composition of the evaluating council, and the evaluation form and criteria. (MJK)

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The Mini-Grant: A Means for Instructional Improvement Through Research

by

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INTRODUCTION

The role of institutional research has been defined and redefined, but, in actuality, each institution essentially evolves its own unique role for its institutional research officer. Dressel, in his book Institutional Research in the University: A Handbook, provides a somewhat negative image of institutional research when he writes that the basic purpose is to:

> ...probe deeply into the workings of an institution for evidence of weaknesses or flaws which interfere with the attainment of purposes or which utilize an overdue amount of resources in so doing. In the research for flaws, no function, individual, or unit should be regarded as off-limits. (p. 23.)

Unfortunately, there are always those on campus who with no encouragement seek out flaws in an institution. Should they be considered natural research officers? The point being made is that we feel institutional research should not be considered the academic counterpart of the financial and fiscal auditor of the college. In organizational terms, institutional research should not be functionally or structurally isolated from the educational functions of the college such as teaching, counseling, and advising. It should be central to the educational processes and considered from a constructive point as a supportive service to effect needed organizational change.

For the preceding reason and others to be mentioned later, Delgado and its Research and Development Division in the spring of 1975 initiated a mini-grant program for faculty. Preparation for this grant program was begun a year or so prior to the actual institution of the program when a grant-writing workshop, resulting in a published manual, and a workshop on the use of computers were offered to the faculty and staff as part of the professional development program of the college. In these workshops, college personnel were shown how to write a grant--the importance of writing to guidelines, being complete, coherent, and concise, and especially the importance of being innovative. In the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences workshop, the faculty were taught how to use a canned computer program, select needed infromation, punch computer cards, and read results of requested information.

Purposes

The purposes for which workshops were held and a mini-grant system begun were primarily five in number. They were to:

- Encourage and assist faculty in the development of specific grant-writing skills which could later be utilized for securing larger federal, state, local or foundation grants. There is nothing that works better than a "hands-on" grant writing experience! An important and beneficial spillover effect also results in those faculty and administrative members who serve as readers and evaluators of the mini-grants.
- Encourage and assist faculty to develop and sharpen

specific research skills. These skills have carry-over benefits for other courses as well as for other faculty members.

- Emphasize institutional commitment to instructionally oriented research. Recognition of such efforts by the faculty through the awarding of mini-grants is an important institutional strategy for change.
- Emphasize another dimension of the role of research as a change agent specifically and directly involved in instruction in a supportive, nuturing, and encouraging role.
- Make faculty members become more aware of specific supportive skills available to them in the research department such as expertise in test construction with reference to reliability, validity, and learning theory.

There are obviously other purposes which could be listed. The preceding were felt, however, to be the main objectives of our program. Also, these stated purposes present an opportunity for measurement of accomplishment by unobstrusive means.

Administration

The instructional imporvements grants program was administered by the Research and Grants Management Department with $2,000 from National Science Foundation funds being used to finance faculty proposals.

A letter was sent from the Research and Grants Management Department to all faculty members inviting them to submit grant

proposals in which they set forth their ideas for instructional improvement. At the same time, a Council for Instructional Improvement was established consisting of ten members from the three sections of the college--Campus Operations and Academic Affairs, Rehabilitation and Student Affairs, and Administration and Fiscal Affairs. Council members were to read and evaluate the submitted proposals according to criteria which were given to them to guide their decisions.

Complete directions or guidelines were attached to the letter sent to the faculty as well as the format to be followed and the criteria that would be used by the Council for Instructional Improvement for evaluating submitted proposals. It was stressed that favorable consideration would be given to projects that were designed to improve instruction in high enrollment courses or in courses that could be shown to occupy a central place in the department or college curriculum and to develop inheritable systems of instruction; that is, the tangible results should be reuseable by future students taught by the proposer as well as by students taught by faculty colleagues.

The format to be followed by faculty members consisted of questions, the answers to which resulted in a thorough description of the proposal. For example:

1. Course and number of students who will benefit.
2. A concise and thorough explanation of the instructional problem.
3. Proposed solution and expected results.

4. Means to be used to determine the effectiveness of the proposed method of improving student learning.
5. Funds requested and complete budget.
6. Appendix of supportive material pertinent to the problem, including letters of endorsement from department chairman and divisional dean.
7. Resume of proposer.

Ten copies of the proposal were submitted on or before an established due date. The due date was strictly adhered to by all faculty who submitted grants.

The ten members of the Council for Instructional Improvement were given copies of all proposals as well as criteria to be used for evaluation purposes. Grants were evaluated on a scale of 1-5 with 1 the lowest and 5 the highest. The criteria used were as follows:

1. Extent of Proposed Program

   This means the number of students who will be reached. We at Delgado have found that instructional problems are more likely to exist in our high enrollment classes, than in smaller classes. Also, potential return will probably be greater when large number of students are affected. We arbitrarily decided on the following scale for

rating purposes:

Rating	Number of Students
1	99 & below
2	100 - 199
3	200 - 299
4	300 - 399
5	400 & above

For sophomore courses, the numbers were lower:

Rating	Number of Students
1	50 & below
2	51 - 99
3	100 - 149
4	150 - 199
5	200 & above

2. Instructional Problem

The proposer was asked to demonstrate that students were not achieving the stated course objectives to extent desired. These objectives could be, for example, affective skills (personality development, self-actualized efforts, value judgments), cognitive skills (analytical thinking, decision making) or psycho-motor skills (manual dexterity, eye-hand coordination). Reasons were to be given why objectives were not being met in terms of inability to provide students with the necessary conditions for learning. These might include:

a. An instructional pace which does not take into account students with different backgrounds and

different rates of learning.

b. Lack of sufficient practice to learn desired skill.

c. Adequate instructional guidance, opportunity for reaching objectives, and feedback not being available thus making it difficult or impossible for students to acquire and demonstrate desired objectives.

Proposer was asked to give reasons why the preceding three conditions could not be met within the course as it is established. It was emphasized that this item would be carefully evaluated because of its importance to the solution.

3. Proposed Solution

The proposer was asked to show clearly how his solution would benefit the students. Clear goals and objectives were required for proper evaluation. In addition the proposer was asked for a system by which student learning could be guided and evaluated, and how the methods or materials being developed could be distributed.

Proposals could be changed as implementation proceeded, but the committee required a well-developed plan.

4. Expected Results

A thorough description of expected results was requested by the committee. Changes will be permitted

as program progresses so long as reasons are given. In order for the committee to evaluate this section of the proposal, the following criteria were used.

a. Expected results should be listed such as "6 individualized packets will be designed or 6 formal spoken English tapes produced." (Vague expected results were rated low. The committee felt that perhaps the faculty member had not thought out his project adequately.)

b. No one expects miracles, but some tangible results are expected. The number estimated above should be realistic. What can a faculty member reasonably produce within a semester?

c. The results should be useable by students taught by proposer (now and later) as well as by students of colleagues. Inheritance value was rated high. (Charisma of instructor added 0 to rating!)

d. Results should include procedures that will check and facilitate student learning, and, also, provide access to the developed learning methods and materials. For instance, where will materials be housed for easy student-instructor access? Will tests be computerized? Will there be pre-tests, post-tests?

5. Determination of Effective Evaluation Procedures

Proposers were asked to describe how they intend

to evaluate their developed products or techniques. It was suggested that evaluations include:

a. A way to measure student achievement--pre-test, post-test, ability to use information learned.
b. A way to measure student reaction to proposer's method--satisfaction, suggestions, etc.
c. A way to measure tangible results (packets, tapes, etc.)
d. A way to measure overall project effectiveness. (Success in advanced courses, employment, etc.).

The Council for Instructional Improvement held several meetings after members had read the proposals. Unclear portions of proposals were discussed and, at times, clarified at these meetings. If not, the proposer was requested to meet with the committee and answer questions.

Each member of the council then rated all proposals individually and assigned a certain amount of money to the proposals he deemed worthy of funding. Averages were taken of the assigned amounts and results submitted to the Research and Grants Development Department.

The Director of the Research and Grants Development Department and the Institutional Research Officer followed the same procedures as the council and attended meetings of the council to discuss the proposals. They submitted individual evaluations of the grants and their results were tabulated separately from those of the council and an average taken of their results. Both sets of averages were then submitted to the Vice President for Campus Operations and

Academic Affairs for his comments. He, in turn, submitted the complete package to the president for approval.

Results

The results of the mini-grant program were all that we hoped for. Faculty interest in new, different, innovative teaching ideas has been stimulated to judge from campus comment. An even greater number of proposals is anticipated next year.

The college plans to allocate funds from its general budget to perpetuate and enlarge the mini-grant program next year. Support by the administration of faculty teaching objectives will be reinforced by the availability of these funds.

Problems arose during the course of the program, too. Lively discussions and compromises occurred. All proposals were worthy of funding and decisions were difficult to make. The $2,000 sum was grossly inadequate. But these were nice problems.

There were other problems too. Some evaluators lagged behind in their reading. Discussions bogged down when council members were unprepared. Also, some proposers were on annual leave, some on another campus, and, consequently, arrangements for them to attend meetings became more involved.

Considerations

If your institution intends to initiate an in-house grant program, there are certain observations concerning the program at Delgado which might prove useful.

- Timing is a critical factor.

  A period of no less than one month should be provided for proposal development and another month for reading,

evaluation, and awarding of grants. It is suggested that proposals be written and submitted during the spring semester, with awards made in the summer for projects to begin in the fall semester.

- Dates should be firm. Although we are not a federal agency, cut-off dates must be strictly adhered to unless a specific waiver is given for cause. This is particularly important for the grant submission date.
- Grant Evaluators and Selection. The grant evaluators should be representative of various sections and divisions of the college and somewhat knowledgeable about grant writing. While it is good to initiate personnel to the process, it is important that there be a core of persons already knowledgeable and appreciative of the grant-writing program.
- Proposal Ratings. There should be a clear process by which proposals are rated. This process should be in writing and made known to everyone. The process and forms must be simple to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. There should also be some check and balance system; for instance, our research department rated separately from the council evaluators so that two unbiased ratings could be achieved and combined.
- Proposal Award - This award should be made by the

president, and a letter of award should be sent to each person receiving one. Also, the announcement for publication should come from the president's office. If you wish to use an example, you can refer to the announcement of federal grants for your respective institutions. Doesn't your congressman make the formal announcement?

- Items To Be Funded. It should be clear what items are to be funded in the proposal request. For example, will the institution pay for released instructional time, equipment, supplies, consultants, student labor, and so on? These questions should be resolved early because doubt about what is to be funded can lead to difficulties.
- One last consideration. The effort expended is well worth the result. Problems that developed were those of inexperience only. In fact, we at Delgado College look forward to a relatively problem-free mini-grant program in 1975-76.

Appendix A

Mini-Grants Awarded

1975

Delgado College

Mini-Grants Awarded 1975

1. Title: Personalized Self-Paced Instruction for Louisiana History.

Applicants propose an alternative to traditional lecture method of teaching Louisiana History by designing a self-paced individual workbook. Funds requested for a research assistant to help in evaluation of effectiveness of text.

Funds recommended by Council $737.

2. Title: Organization and Implementation of Clerical and Business Program for Students with Special Needs.

Applicant proposes a program for linguistically, educationally, and economically disadvantaged students (approximately 25) to help them attain a functional level for college secretarial courses. Learning aids, and individualized packets are to be developed and funds are requested for a recorder, cassette racks, overhead projector, and film strip projector which are needed in the preparation of original material and teaching aids.

Funds recommended by Council $560.

3. Title: Alternative Speech Library.

Applicant proposes an alternative speech library to assist students who experience difficulty with formal spoken English. Funds are requested for 100-200 Cassette tapes and a cassette system.

Funds recommended by Council $507.

4. Title: Enhancement of Philosophy and Sociology Programs with Original Slides of Levant.

The proposer will be in the Levant for the summer and requests funds for additional travel and for the development of slide presentations for philosophy and sociology courses.

Funds recommended by Council $46.50.
These funds were recommended for slides. No funds were recommended for additional travel.

5. Title: Improvement in Work Adjustment Techniques Through In-Service Training and Follow-up.

Applicants wish to conduct an investigation which will utilize follow-up data as a basis for improving the work adjustment services of the Delgado Rehabilitation Center.

Funds recommended by Council for expendable supplies $160.50.

Appendix B

Composition of Evaluating Councils

COMPOSITION OF INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT COUNCIL

Campus Operations and Academic Affairs	
Academic Deans or their representatives	8
Rehabilitation and Student Affairs	
Assistant Vice President for Rehabilitation and Student Affairs	1
Administrative and Fiscal Affairs	
Director of Auxiliary Enterprises	1
Total	10

COMPOSITION OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Director of Research and Grants Management	1
Institutional Research Officer	1
Total	2

Appendix C

Evaluation Form and Criteria

COUNCIL FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

Evaluation Form

Name of Proposer:

Title of Proposer:

Rate each proposal against the stated criteria. Assign ratings using a five-point scale as follows: 5, very favorable; 4, favorable; 3, average; 2, unfavorable; 1, very unfavorable.

1. Extent of Proposed Program (number of students to be reached) _____ 1.
2. Instructional problem: _____ 2.
3. Proposed solution: _____ 3.
4. Expected results: _____ 4.
5. Evaluation procedures _____ 5.

TOTAL RATING _____ Total

6. Overall rating of the proposal _____

7. Remarks on budget:

8. Remarks on overall rating:

9. Recommended sum:

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